

## Unwanted Medicines and Educating our Communities: What Have we Learned, How are we Doing and What are the Next Steps? Experiences from the Great Lakes States

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Medicines are produced in increasing volumes every year. With this growth comes concern regarding environmental fate of unwanted medicines. Recent studies identified pharmaceutical compounds in fresh and marine waters nationwide, and several of these bioactive compounds are potentially harmful to aquatic organisms, even in small quantities. Additionally, improper medicine disposal poses poisoning risks to children, the elderly and pets and can lead to drug/identity theft. Unused medicines may accumulate in homes or be flushed, placed in the trash, or given to others, all of which have significant disadvantages. One approach for decreasing amounts of unwanted medicines reaching the environment is the organization of collection programs that ensure safer methods of disposal. This presentation will describe the status of our efforts in the Great Lakes Region including collection programs, outreach and education with an eye toward what is still needed, and what should be our next steps to expand the program nationally. Should we focus more on the front end of the cycle including drug manufacturing, and reducing the amounts of waste from the home, or should we focus on non-residential waste of pharmaceuticals including confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), hospitals and clinics? Where do we go from here?

